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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000707

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2019
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [DS](#) [SNAR](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: TFH01: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND EXPRESSION
POST-COUP UPDATE 2

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 687
[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 633

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 (b and d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The freedoms of expression and of the press in Honduras continue to be threatened as members of the de facto government intimidate and attempt to close media outlets, harass journalists, and seize the cameras of photographers and filmmakers. On an unofficial visit the UNHCR Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression Frank La Rue told the Ambassador that he found conditions worse than he had expected; he plans to speak out strongly against the crack-down on the press and has urged the USG to do the same. Post will continue to follow the developments and report on claims of violations and potential closures of media for political purposes. End Summary.

UNHCR SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR VISITS

[1](#)2. (C) UNHCR Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression Frank La Rue visited "unofficially" on his own accord August 2-4 from his native Guatemala to investigate the freedom of expression concerns in Honduras post-coup. He shared his thoughts and findings at a meeting with the Ambassador on August 4. La Rue stated that Honduras is in far worse condition than he had expected beforehand and confirmed a general trend previously reported by the Embassy of increased police aggression towards journalists, protesters and bystanders alike; the targeting and destruction or seizure of cameras; senseless violence and intimidation; and short detentions where protesters are taken into custody, intimidated through violence or threats of violence and then released before charged with anything or entered into the justice system as a means to avoid future judicial retribution.

[1](#)3. (C) La Rue stated that he planned to make a strong statement in a communique this week based on his findings. He urged the USG to escalate our criticism of the de facto regime and the human rights situation. La Rue also stated that while it is in human rights groups' nature to embellish their findings, he believes Honduras is "boiling" and the polarization of society is bound to have long-term effects. He also reported his concern for the human rights groups being overwhelmed with the amount of work they are doing while trying to defend human rights under an unsympathetic de facto government.

RADIO GLOBO ORDERED TO CLOSE

14. (SBU) According to the General Manager of Radio Globo Alejandro Villatoro, the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) informed him August 4 that the frequencies of Radio Globo, which reaches a national audience, will be shut down. Pro-Zelaya Radio Globo has been documenting human rights violations committed by the de facto regime and has also served as a platform for Zelaya to reach his followers in Honduras. Pro-Zelaya journalist Eduardo Maldonado is its key contributor and has often been the subject of the de facto regime's anti-press policies. La Rue, who had been speaking on air on Radio Globo about allegations of violations of freedom of the press on the morning of August 4, confirmed the order to close in a meeting later that day with Ambassador Llorens. According to Embassy sources, Radio Globo has two choices: to shut itself down or to take its case to court. Villatoro considers any legal appeal a hapless cause given the perceived partiality of the justice system against pro-Zelaya entities.

CHANNEL 36 CLOSURE NEXT?

15. (C) La Rue shares the opinion of Channel 36 owner Esdras Lopez that his pro-Zelaya television station will be closed next (reftel). Lopez claims he has been warned that the case against his station is being put together and it is only a

matter of time until he is served his papers as well. Regardless, Lopez has maintained his anti-regime stance and along with Radio Globo continues to be the only source of pro-Zelaya information on Honduran television and radio.

CHANNEL 8 UP FOR GRABS

16. (U) The President of CONATEL, Miguel Rodas, stated that the de facto regime would return Channel 8 to Elias Asfura's enterprise Teleunsa, which is consistent with a pre-coup Supreme Court ruling that had been ignored by the Zelaya administration. Previously, Channel 8 had been appropriated by President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya's administration for government broadcasting and pro-Zelaya propaganda. Rodas also indicated that Channel 12, whose ownership had been in dispute between Asfura and the Rosenthal family, would be awarded to Asfura's Eldi Corporation. (Note: Jaime Rosenthal's El Tiempo newspaper has been the most critical of the de facto regime. The Rosenthal family has been one of President Zelaya's staunchest supporters in the private sector. End Note.)
LLORENS